

MAINE SOUND AND STORY IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE FIRST COAST

AN INTERVIEW WITH SONNY BEAL FOR THE FIRST COAST JONESPORT/BEALS
COLLECTION

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY GALEN KOCH

JONESPORT, MAINE OCTOBER, 2018

TRANSCRIPT BY GRIFFIN POLLOCK, GIULIA CARDOSO, GALEN KOCH

Interviewee Name: Sonny Beal

Project/Collection Title: Jonesport TFC

Interviewer(s) Name(s) and Affiliation: Galen Koch (The First Coast)

Interview Location: Beals Island, Washington County, ME

Date of Interview: October, 2018

Interview Description: Sonny Beal, a lobsterman on Beals Island, discusses his work with the greater lobstering community. Beal talks about the Lobstering Union, the Jonesport-Beals Co-op, and the Maine Lobster Marketing Collaborative. Beal also mentions the fluctuating tensions surrounding the Union, the survival potential of the industry, and other work he has been involved in through the years.

Key Words: Lobstering, community, union,

Collection Description: Audio interviews from The First Coast's residency in Jonesport and Beals Island, October 2018.

Citation: Beal, Sonny, The First Coast 2018 Oral History Interview, (October 2018), by Galen Koch, 23 pages, Maine Sound and Story. Online: Insert URL (Last Accessed: Insert Date).

Transcribed By: Griffin Pollock, Elle Gilchrist and Galen Koch

GK: Galen Koch

SB: Sonny Beal

[0:54:35.4]

START OF SONNYBEAL_JONESPORT_TFC_AUDIO_01

[00:00:00.00]

GK: The Stumble In, Stagger Out! Which is unoperational at the moment?

SB: No this is usually a winter bar, we don't use it in the summertime, so. But you know bars are pretty far away, so I built one.

GK: Oh my god, that's so great. I wish it was happening that would be really fun.

SB: It is fun, it's a good time down here. I got the TV, a big stereo, and all that stuff. We haven't cleaned our basement yet from summer, just dropping shit and throwing shit.

GK: Yeah wow, great. This is a nice bar. So it's the Stumble In, Stagger Out?

SB: Stumble In, Stagger Out is what I named it, yup.

GK: Seems appropriately named.

SB: Yup I got a pool table and a pellet stove over in the corner there.

[00:00:58.12]

That's what we heat the house with. This is my vinyl room over there, where I do my lettering and stuff in there.

GK: Oh I see all the rolls of vinyl. How did you get into that?

SB: Abby kinda got me into that, it was something that we were - it was before kids, BC, Before Children, and this is my generic reasoning that I give everybody how I got into this is Abby had a friend that works for Van Sichel selling cars, they used to they had a vinyl cutter like that that they'd make the stickers, put the price tag on the cars and course that's how they started doing boat names and stuff like that so she's like well that's something we could do, do from home, stuff like that. So all right good enough we bought the stuff and "Let Us Letter It" is the name of the business, Let Us Letter It was born. And Damon was born and then Caden was born and then Let Me Letter It was born. So she became, obviously she became the stay at home mom and I took over the business and I've been doing it ever since

[00:02:00.09]

and that was 14, 15 years we've had it.

GK: Wow that's cool.

SB: So if you see a name on a boat in Jonesport chances are I did it.

GK: A side business to the lobster and all the other committees, 'cause you're on a lot of committees. Well first I'll have you say your name. 'Cause I need to. For the record.

SB: Sonny Beal, Beals Island.

GK: Perfect, so just tell me a little bit about what you have going on. You're obviously--

SB: I'm on the Board of Directors of the Maine Lobstermen's Association, I'm on the Board of Directors of the Maine Lobster Marketing Collaborative, on the Finance Committee of it as well. I'm on the Board of Directors and Vice President of the Beals/Jonesport co-op where we sell our lobsters, I think that's it. And I coach basketball - kids basketball.

GK: Are you coaching your son?

SB: Yup.

[00:03:01.20]

He was in the summer league and a fall league and now regular grammar school season's gonna start up, I don't coach that. I coach the younger group the peewees, so I'll coach Caden, he's the youngest one. I'll coach him during peewee season. And then onto spring ball which I'll coach that. So...

GK: How do you find the time?

SB: I just make time, it is what it is, kids come first, so you know everything else spins around that unless it's work that desperately needs to be done but that doesn't happen too often, I try not to miss too much.

GK: And you can do that, you can make your own schedule.

SB: Well, that's the great thing about being a lobsterman is you're actually a business owner or self-employed, whatever you want to call it but you make your own hours, even with the lettering stuff so it works out pretty good.

GK: And when did you start lobstering?

[00:03:55.18]

SB: Since I was old enough to put a pair of boots on, basically. Started with my father, I was born '76 so I mean I was an infant, I'm sure when I first went aboard the boat, grew up aboard

the boat and going lobstering pretty much my debut of lobstering days was sitting in the corner, I remember trying to feed ritz crackers to sculpin in the fore of the boat. But yeah until I got old enough to actually do the work and going with him and going with other people, he quahog dragged for a couple of years like 15 - 20 years so right in the middle there when I was growing up so we didn't do a whole lot of lobster fishing during that time but he bought me a boat when I was 12 and I started fishing that and went with a lot of other people doing various things, gill-netting, quahogging, lobstering, scalloping, urchining, all kinds of stuff whatever I could, however I could get aboard a boat that's what I wanted to do.

[00:04:58.09]

GK: I've never seen the quahog dragging but I saw one of the drags at the Shipyard that was pulled up there, that thing was massive!

SB: Yeah, they're pretty big, the drag or the boat?

GK: The drag, the heavy massive--

SB: Yeah they're the size of a small car, they didn't used to be that way. They were a lot smaller than that but everything evolves, bigger boats, bigger power. Just like lobstering bigger traps, bigger boats, all that stuff.

GK: And they're still doing that?

SB: Yeah.

GK: Is that fishery in danger?

SB: I don't really know... I haven't - I don't follow it as much but from what I can gather there's not a whole lot of boats doing it, there used to be you know a couple dozen boats in the town that would quahog drag but now there's only maybe half a dozen, something like that and that's mostly because of

[00:06:02.07]

markets you know being able to sell 'em and stuff. So if it's got to do with licenses. Some of the licenses are restricted or whatever you can't just go get one you gotta go buy one or whatever. Another part is that lobstering boomed so everyone went lobstering, same thing as fish dragging you know that kind of went to pieces, the quahogging didn't go to pieces like fish dragging did but everybody went lobstering, basically.

GK: When did that really happen in Jonesport, the boom?

SB: Probably around let's see... I graduated college in '97, mid-90s, Early to mid-90s somewhere around there when it really started to take off.

GK: And did you notice a shift in the community or how did it change things that were happening here?

SB: I dunno, I was 20 - 21 so I really didn't pay much attention to what the community was doing.

GK: Did you notice more people your age going out or was it pretty common for everyone to be a fishermen anyway?

SB: It was starting to, when I liked graduated high school and college it was starting to become more of a trend to not stick around so much

[00:07:30.28]

you know I'm not saying that a lot of people left but a lot more than what was normal like a lot of my high school classmates don't live around here anymore, I mean some of them do well, I say a lot there's only I had actually a big class I think I had 30-something in the class, maybe. But... half of 'em or so don't live around here which is back in the 80s would be weird to have someone move away I think, just guessing, but I don't really know for sure.

GK: It seems like that more so here than in some other spots on the Maine coast there's multiple generations and young people still.

SB: Well especially now with the lobster boom, christ, everybody wants to stay and go fishin' nobody wants to leave to do somethin' else that's just becomin' part of the norm, it's just switchin' back to people stickin' around. You know.

GK: And do you think those kids that are staying are going to get their own boats

[00:08:33.06]

and be able to be captains?

SB: A lot of them do. A lot of them already have their own boats, you know. A lot of the guys that are fishin' now with the bigger boats they started right out with a boat, here you go, go fishin' and then just worked up and then in no time they was Kings of the Fleet, as they say.

GK: They've got those huge boats that you see, are those the younger guys?

SB: Yeah, they're pretty much all younger than me. There's a few that's older but.

GK: What did you start on when you were 12?

SB: The Moneymaker, I must have a picture of it somewhere, it was a little 22 ft, it had an aluminum bottom and fiberglass sides and it was fiberglassed over. It weighed probably as much as six elephants and with a 45 Mercury on the back of it, I used to have some wicked races with sailboats, I'm telling yah, it was amazing. I had a load of traps on it one day, it was sailin' up the reach

[00:09:41.06]

just barely making a wake racing a sailboat up the reach, not necessarily racing we were riding beside each other waving to each other the whole way up the reach - he was under power. If he has a sail up he woulda beat me bad but... That thing was something else. It now resides on the side of the road, it's been condemned, I guess. No good anymore.

GK: How long were you fishing with that boat?

SB: I fished, well, I fished through college with it. When I got out of college I still had it and then when I got out of college I set traps that summer

[00:10:28.28]

and ended up getting a job before the summer was even out I got a job in Gloucester, Massachusetts working for Varian Ion Implanters. It's a company that makes huge multi million dollar machines that do the doping for silicon chips, in case you were wondering .

GK: Do the doping?

SB: Pretty much, you open up your computer you've got that long black chip with the legs on it, looks like a little centipede or whatever, those are silicon chips and the doping is like machines that program it and tell it what to do. And I was in test and repair. I had an Associates Degree in Electronics, so I got my traps up real quick, put the boat on the bank, moved to Gloucester... worked there for 8 months, through the winter, 330- midnight, pretty much was miserable the whole time I was there. Not the whole time but I really didn't like it. And came home one weekend and was talking to my father, telling him how much I didn't like it and he said, "What do you want to do?" And I said, "Well, honestly

[00:11:32.25]

I'd like to go lobster fishin'." He says, "All right, you wanna come home,we'll cut the dragging gear out of the boat, we'll build traps, we'll go lobstering together." So that's what we did. I went back, put in my two weeks notice, moved back home, we built traps, we finished dragging the rest of the season out, once the season was over we cut the dragging gear out and loaded it with traps and went lobster fishin'. Never had dragging gear in it since.

GK: And that was the boat that you're in now?

SB: That's the boat I'm in now, the Nancy Anne. That was 1998.

GK: Wow. So he was all for it.

SB: Yup, he - lobstering was his passion but he ended up going dragging because lobstering wasn't great when I was in grade school and high school and stuff, he could make more money quahogging so that's what he did.

[00:12:28.21]

GK: Where was he fishing mostly?

SB: They were all over the place.

GK: All over.

SB: A lot of the places are where we're lobstering, there's people lobstering there but he'd go downeast down by Mark Island, he'd go up to the Westward up by (place?) or way out to the Westward out towards Mount Desert Rock, all over the place, wherever they could find a better hogs to work on.

GK: So when he, when you came back and took the dragging gear out did he go lobstering with you?

SB: Oh yeah. Yeah, yeah oh yeah, we loaded up the boat and took off, went and set a whole bunch of traps, whatevah. You know two or three trips go and set traps and the first time we went back to go haul 'em we had strings runnin' down the bay and he hauled the first string, I don't know what it was, probably 15 pair or something like that and I worked the stern baitin' pockets and this and that, second string he sailed up to it he went, "You wanna haul this one?" I'm like, "Yeah, sure, absolutely." And so I hauled that one

[00:13:34.27]

and then got done hauling that string and I stepped back and he goes, "What are you doin'?" And I said, "Well, I figured it was your turn to haul." He goes, "Nah, you keep haulin'" and he never haul another trap. He let me haul and he worked in the stern.

GK: Cool.

SB: He was stern captain. Telling me what to do, you know, teaching me, you know how to do it with a power boat and stuff but yup that was how it went I guess.

GK: Was the equipment any different? I mean it's not that long ago but.

SB: No, I mean the traps we were on a shoestring budget so we built smaller traps, little three foot traps because they were cheaper, you could buy more, build more of 'em. The hauler was a 12" hauler that we soon replaced with a 14. You know other than that, same idea. The rope wasn't as big like it is now but we weren't fishin' trawls like I do now.

[00:14:33.07]

Just fishing buoys and pairs and triples and stuff like that.

GK: And has where you go changed in recent years?

SB: No, not really because even when I go out to my outside fishing grounds like I move stuff out there now, I started back then. You know out there there was only just a couple of guys out there and I went out and I was trying to steer clear of them so kinda fished a different area and now, christ, everybody fishes out there so I've been doin' it for 20 years and you know... but yeah I haven't really changed, I guess I don't go... like I set some in the bay this year but not a lot for the most part I fish all trawls and right now I've got all trawls so that part's different

[00:15:34.13]

we didn't, when we started we didn't fish trawls but that's kind of the way to go now.

GK: Yeah why did that become... I remember going out with somebody in like... maybe it was like 5 years ago and they were hauling trawls and being from Stonington I was like... what?

SB: Yeah well it's almost more efficient to do it that way, you can haul em quicker and you can move 'em easier, it takes less rope because you've got less end lines and that's another thing like with the whales and all that shit they're hollering about (something) lines and this and that so a lot of people trawled up and they actually made laws in certain areas you could only have so many traps on a line. You can't have any fewer than... well it depends on where you are from shore

[00:16:31.05]

but you know some places it's 15 traps, some places it's 3, that's part of another reason but it's just easier to fish that way and especially if everyone is doin' it. It's easier to set your gear out and fish among each other.

GK: Do you think it's easy for people to navigate all of the areas and regulations, how is that made... does MLA have any kind of role in helping fishermen understand what is allowed where? (SB: Yeah, oh yeah.) I imagine you could be like, I didn't know...

SB: Right just - report the changes and the rules and publicize it, and make sure everyone's aware I guess that way.

GK: But it's kind of up to you to know.

SB: Oh yeah, it's your responsibility to know the rules when you step aboard the boat, obviously, yeah. I mean it's just like getting a car you are obliged to... you need to know the rules of the road so it's the same thing

[00:17:36.08]

but yeah I mean the MLA does is affiliated with the newspaper and you know always is publicizing rule changes and sending out emails with rule changes and all that so yeah. They help quite a bit.

GK: Do you feel like they're coming more rapidly than before?

SB: They're comin' at us left hand and right, I'll tell yah. I mean, it's always been, it's always been something that the fishermen have had to deal with ever since time began basically, or government began I guess I should say. Like when my father was president of the MLA back in the late '50s early '60s there was oil refineries that they wanted to build and the MLA got sued by the state for something to do with sternman, sternmen weren't self-employed.

[00:18:34.22]

So they went after the MLA to prove a point, I dunno that was long before my time. That's just shit that my father had to deal with when he was President, it's just always something, the whales and different regulations along the road.

GK: So that was like the MLA didn't want oil refineries built. What's so interesting, too, to me is that the fisherman falls in this interesting gray zone where sometimes you're on the right and sometimes you're on the left.

SB: it all depends on what's best for us, what's best for us is what side we're on, you know it's not like that my father and his constituents were against oil refineries they were just against 'em down here in Downeast Maine.

[00:19:21.22]

They wanted to put one down in Machiasport and that would, the way that the Gulf of Maine runs an oil spill would decimate the whole friggin' Gulf because the Gulf of Maine, it runs like a toilet bowl. You flush a toilet bowl and it circles like that. THAT's what the Gulf of Maine does and it would be devastating for everybody.

GK: Yeah, what are some of the other, I mean obviously there's the whale issue.

SB: Whales and vertical lines right now and the herring quota is gonna be huge next year, we're still waiting on that to see exactly how much of a cut it's gonna be. But...

GK: It's wild that it's sort of so up in the air. I was reading in, I think it's Fishermen's Voice, and it was just like one option was like 75% cut and another one was 50%, it's huge.

SB: Yeah it's crazy.

GK: And it's like...

SB: Would you like a beverage?

GK: Sure.

SB: You want beer or Truly?

[00:20:26.19]

GK: Um... Truly. If offered a Truly, take a Truly.

(cans opening)

GK: Yeah, the other thing, I was talking to Steve [Peabody] about it today and not anything political but just thinking about like... the way that the co-op, the starting of these co-ops really shifted the whole business.

SB: Well, when they started the Beals-Jonesport co-op my father went to Winter Harbor and he went to Bucks Harbor and I think he went down to Korea to help them start theirs as well.

GK: Oh really?

SB: Yeah.

GK: And what was his--did he ever talk to you about why he wanted to do it?

SB: Because they were gettin' screwed by the other dealers. The other buyers I guess. They were, the buyers, were givin' 'em whatever they wanted, and the lobstermen couldn't do anything about it because like my father said, if you think you're self employed, try going to haul with no fuel and no bait and no one to sell your lobsters to. So they made their own wharf, got their own buyer and the rest is history.

GK: And that... could you explain how it works a little bit?

[0:21:46.5]

SB: Well the co-op is owned by the fishermen basically. Anybody who sells there, you have to be a member, you pay 100 dollars, the board votes whether you can be a member or not, we pretty much don't deny anybody unless you're a raging lunatic. So...

GK: I'm sure there are a few.

SB: Oh there's a few, yeah. And we even let them in too. And pay 100 bucks, you're a member for life. So basically the co-op has fuel, it has bait, it has the basic necessities like bilge pumps and hauler liners and shifting cables and stuff like that. Oil, you know just basic stuff that they keep on hand. They have bait, fuel, sell all lobsters there, and then we get paid each day for the

lobsters that we sell, minus our bait and fuel that we use. That gets taken out, and then we get a check every day. At the end of the year we get what we call "rebate," which basically where the co-op is a non-profit wharf, it can't make any money at year's end.

[0:23:09.9]

So come the end of the year, say the boat gets a dollar a pound for a lobster and the co-op sells 'em for a dollar fifty, there's 50 cents profit the co-op makes. Well the co-op only needs 25 cents to run to pay salary, pay for the salt and electricity and this and that and everything that needs to be paid for. And you got a quota left over, so you can't put that in the bank and sit on it, you have to turn that over so you don't have any profit at year's end. So that's where the rebate comes in, depending on how much money is there, and how many pounds the co-op has bought, each fisherman gets so much per pound of every lobster they caught throughout the year. Last year it was a dollar and forty cents for every pound of lobsters that we caught. So say I caught 10 pounds, I get a dollar forty cents a pound, there you go. So it's a pretty good check for the most part, at Christmas time, nice Christmas bonus.

GK: Yeah, at a time when you're not really going out.

SB: At a time when the season is pretty much over basically, yeah. So a lot of people use that to get through the winter.

GK: And has that, do you think, forced the hand of some of the other owners.

[0:24:37.7]

SB: Yes, that's the problem with the co-op. The co-op started it because they had to, and I remember when it was 35 cents and it used to be 5 or 10 cents before that. But it just kept going up and up and up. And basically the smaller wharfs are kinda gettin' drowned in the lobster economy ocean. They really are having a hard job paying expenses plus being able to keep up with the bonus at the end of the year. So in turn they're losin' fishermen and just like in anything, the strong get stronger and the weak get weaker. But it's not anything that the co-op did to... Didn't do it on purpose, we're just doin' it for ourselves. And it is kind of gotten out of hand a little bit I think. And a lot of it's to do with withholdin' money from the boat at that time. But at the time that you sell your lobsters. But also the wharfs have gotta have money to run, so in the spring of the year when there's not a lot of lobsters comin' in. The wharf has to rely on that money, the difference that they get from buying a lobster to sellin' a lobster, they need to have that money to run that wharf.

[0:26:12.7]

Well then in the fall of the year when you're catchin' all kinds of lobsters, they're pretty much all set, but they still--you can't change it, you gotta keep doin' the same thing. So that's why it is the way it is I guess. But it's--it doesn't need to be a dollar forty. I mean I'm not disappointed in it, I like it quite a bit. I'm not complaining a bit, but it just makes it hard for the other guys to compete. But on the other hand if you raise the boat price a little bit and still sell 'em for the

same thing, your rebate would be less but then you got the other wharfs that wouldn't be able to pay that daily price. So the little guy's kinda screwed either way.

GK: Well do you think there's like a danger, and I'm just shooting off the cuff, I've never heard that anyone's worried about this, but maybe they are--of like a corporate--like somebody deciding to take over one of these wharfs? Is that even possible?

[0:27:24.4]

SB: Oh yeah, that's already happened. Like mid-coast Maine and stuff like that, there's Garbo Lobster and there's been some huge, huge companies and who was it that just got bought out by... Somebody else. I don't remember. I can't remember now who it was.

GK: Down somewhere in Southern-Midcoast?

SB: Yeah, somewhere in Southern Maine, I wanna say it was Ready Lobster (GK: Really?) that got by somebody big. And then Garbo I think sold to like Russians or something?

GK: Yeah, that's what I would worry about. That all the sudden it's like the dragging industry and all the sudden we have international holders. Which totally defeats the purpose of the whole industry.

SB: Well and that's another reason why the lobstering union was started. Of which I'm a member of that as well. And that was modelled after the Beals-Jonesport Co-op model, and they're actually--Trenton Bridge buys lobsters from the co-op which is the company that the lobstering union bought most of. They bought the wholesale of Trenton Bridge.

GK: Oh, and that's the issue.

[0:28:44.2]

SB: That's been a big issue. For a lot of people at the co-op. But they buy lobsters from a lot of wharfs around here, especially. So they're doing the same thing, they're buying lobsters and they're selling 'em and making a profit, and splittin' it with the fishermen. And that's, you know, same thing. So... Two rebate checks this year! Woo-hoo! [Both laugh] Uncle Sam's gonna love me!

GK: Well that's--yeah, I mean it's--I know people have issues with the co-op, I mean the unions, not the co-op, for obvious, maybe obvious, maybe not so obvious reasons, people take issue with the person who started it--

SB: The reason--the people--the thing that people have a problem with--the problem that people have with the union I guess is how I should word it. There's a couple of problems. One, it's a

union, and everyone's scared to death of a union. And around this place change is probably the worst thing you could ever do. Anything new, anything different, any slight sorta change, people just flip their fuckin' minds. You know, panic. Hit the panic button and run like hell. Secondly, when the union gets started, there was a lot of... Hot-heads. Bigmouths, assholes, however you wanna say it. That pretty much were saying, "You're gonna join the union 'cause we're gonna force you to join the union." And once you say that, you're gonna piss people off. 'Cause there's nobody more stubborn and independent than a Maine lobster fisherman. And to tell 'em they're gonna do something is not the way to do it. So there was that, and that's how the hatred of the union got started basically.

[0:30:46.5]

GK: And it's kinda persisted, but they do have members, right?

SB: Oh yeah, they do, yeah. No, no they do, they got--I don't know how many now--last time there was like 256, but most of 'em around here. Or a lot of 'em around here.

GK: Oh really? I knew a lot of guys in Southern Maine who were part--but they had such different--they have such different issues down there, 'cause they don't even have access to the water.

SB: Right, so that's the problem with the Southern Maine guys, they don't have places to sell their lobsters, they don't have places, a dock, something that the union could come in and buy lobsters at, you know?

GK: Yeah, they don't even have--like the guy that I know, (name?) goes to Portland to buy bait which is crazy! So far away!

SB: Yeah, well 'cause it's all summer homes down there.

GK: I know, yeah.

SB: It's crazy.

GK: It is crazy, and that's something I feel like here is like pretty amazing that there's so much working waterfront.

[0:31:54.0]

SB: Mhm, yeah. And this is--and it's all--well not all, but... A lot of it is handed down from generation to generation, as is probably a lot of places that have private wharfs, but there's a lot of private wharfs down here, from here east, a lot of guys have their on wharfs that they use. A lot of it is there's a lot more tide up here, so there's a lot more um... I don't know, well tidal

waters, so it comes in and out. So it's not necessarily good spots for a permanent wharf that you can access all the time, not like at low water. And when Beals island was settled, everybody settled around the shoreline. Nobody went to the middle of the island. The middle of the island, of Beals island, is undeveloped basically. So you know, plop your house on a rock on the shoreside somewhere and build a wharf in front of it, and there you go, you're home. And they get passed down and passed down, like my wharf. My grandfather's and my father's, and now it's mine.

[0:33:06.9]

GK: And have the property taxes not gotten totally insane?

SB: They're pretty crazy.

GK: They are? I'm just wondering, like it's kind of amazing that people have hung onto them for so long.

SB: It's not as bad as probably some of the other places along the coast, but it's not great and a lot of it's to do with the amount of, I think, summer people that come in that don't necessarily contribute to the school, and they only pay taxes--I don't know, I guess I can't say that 'cause I don't really know for sure. But just hearing hearsay.

GK: I know, I always get hung up on that, and then try to talk about it, and I'm like "well I know they're not paying something, but I don't know what it is." What it is, well they're hiking the value up of the homes if they build like crazy homes. And then it just hikes up your property tax. And then some people, I think if you have a second home, you have to pay property tax, but you don't have to pay wealth tax or something.

[0:34:10.1]

SB: Yeah, I don't know.

GK: It is kind of a mess though. But it's so different here than, say, Stonington where it's like everything's--all those wharfs that used to look like these wharfs have Adirondack chairs on them. You're like, "whoa, this is totally changing." I know. So your dad was a big figure in the community it sounds like.

SB: Yeah, yeah. He was first (title?) for a while when they put the bridge connecting the island, they put a toll on it, and I don't remember what the toll was, it was like 5 cents per person or 25 cents for a car or something so they'd--it was cheaper to take a car over and come back, so they'd load the car up with as many people as they could put in it, and pay 25 cents for the car to go over and then 25--or you only had to pay one way I think. So people would drive a whole car load of people over the bridge to go walk or do whatever, and then drop 'em off and turn

around and come back. So he was first to get the toll booth removed from the bridge. Successfully.

GK: And where was your house that you grew up in?

SB: It's up on top of the hill here on the island, when you come left off the bridge and you come to the stop sign, you get to church and you get the old auto place. Right next to the church is my mother's house where I grew up.

[0:35:43.1]

GK: And she's still alive?

SB: Yep, yep.

GK: Oh wow. Did she work when she was--

SB: She is from Pennsylvania, so she was writing for Downeast Magazine when her and my father met, and she actually did an article on him about the old refinery.

GK: Wow! It sounds like me!

SB: Yeah, that's how they met. But yeah, she's done a bunch of things. She's an abstracter now. Does title searches, land deed searches and stuff like that.

GK: Oh yeah, neat.

SB: Yeah, you wouldn't think there'd be much work for her, but she's pretty busy.

GK: Doing like--God, I should talk to her. That stuff is so interesting!

SB: Well, she could talk to ya.

GK: It is so totally interesting! Like people's land rights and what they own? That kind of thing? Like looking back?

SB: Yeah, history searches and all that.

GK: Yeah, that's really interesting. And I'm sure if any of this stuff starts to get sold, people are gonna be... IF. If I don't know, do you think it's a--something that you'll have to worry about? Loss of these piers and waterfront access, or is it not on the minds?

[0:37:00.6]

SB: Umm, some of them maybe, and this might fall into going back to the little guy buying lobsters, if he goes out of business, what do you do with the wharf, but the co-op, that's not going anywhere. My wharf on my land. That's not going anywhere. There's gonna be people that aren't gonna sell. So I mean the only... I mean, there'll be some people that sell, there's people from out of state that own houses right on the shore that somebody else owned. Somebody died, nobody wanted the house, they sold it. Some out of stater buys it or whatever. But I don't think it's gonna be a huge issue really. We're out in the sticks enough that I don't think it'd be too much. It takes too long to get here.

GK: Yeah. And do you think that industry is gonna remain steady? Like it's been on this upward--

SB: What do you mean? Like lobster population?

GK: Anything, lobster population, regulations, the stuff with the small guy.

SB: Well regulations will be here forever and they'll just keep comin' up with more, there's no question about that. As far as the health of the lobster industry, from what I've seen with juveniles and egg lobsters, I think that we're gonna have a pretty good population for quite a while to come. Obviously we're not gonna have record years every year, it's gotta have some sort of--we just can't keep doing it. I mean, what's gonna be next, we're gonna catch 200 million pounds of lobsters? I mean that's just insane.

[0:38:44.4]

GK: Right, you need like a level-off for--

SB: Yeah, it's gonna fluctuate, it's gonna go down, it's gonna come back up, it's gonna do this, it's gonna do that. But as far as the overall health of the lobster, I think it's fine. I honestly think that global warming will have more of a part in the lobster industry than the actual population of the lobsters. Or the health of the lobsters I should say.

GK: Yeah, in what ways?

SB: I think that--well, I think that they're migrating north. And they're very finicky creatures that like the water temperature just right. And with global warming if that changes one way or the other, they're not gonna hang around. They're gonna go somewhere it's more comfortable. So I mean I don't really know much about it, but I know a little bit, and what I know, that's my theory. It's probably wrong, but that's my theory.

[0:39:51.0]

GK: Have you observed anything? Like any noticeable shift in the water temperature yourself?

SB: Uh, not a lot. I noticed more, like in the last couple years, I think the tide runs harder for whatever reason, I don't know why. But I think the tide runs harder than it used to.

GK: Well Steve was saying it's higher.

SB: Yep, it's higher and lower. On a higher water and a lower tide. Yeah, it's crazy 'cause I mean--well, point in hand, over to the co-op, the skiff float. That thing grounds out all the time now, it never used to. It hasn't moved! It's crazy. Yeah, the tides definitely have gotten bigger, run harder. It's, it's... I don't know what it is, what the reason is. There's your background noise [referring to the sounds of a dog]

GK: I know! Why don't you come down here buddy! Hi Oakley. Oh, I know, I mean the sea level stuff, which does seem that it's just whether you're a skeptic or not, it's happening. And how that's going to affect these towns is... I don't know what's gonna happen.

[0:41:13.1]

SB: I don't either. If lobstering goes to shit, this town is gonna go to shit, I tell ya. These two towns, they will. And that's--that would be--I'm not saying it's gonna happen, 'cause I just said I don't think it's gonna. But that would be another 'what if' case scenario that people would be telling out. As far as the homes and property and stuff.

GK: Yeah. 'Cause that's--I mean essentially it seems like that's what most families--like somebody in most families here that are year rounders are lobstermen. Right?

SB: Yeah, for the most part. That's a pretty accurate statement.

GK: IT's big! It's big!

SB: If they're not a lobsterman, they definitely rely on the lobster fishing industry.

GK: Right, they're working in it in some capacity. Yep. And not too many people clamming, not as many in others.

SB: Um, I don't know I really don't know that. I know i got a friend that buys clams. I know he's bought quite a bit, but the clamming is on again off again, you know, with the--what'do they call it. Red tide, the algae. Fresh water in the salt water. So it's kinda--clammin's not as reliable as it used to be.

[0:42:44.6]

GK: Who's your friend who buys?

SB: Danny Rogde.

GK: Danny Rugby?

SB: Rogde. R-O-G-D-E. Atlantic Shellfish, going out of town headed west.

GK: Okay, I wasn't sure if that was an open business! I think I passed it a couple days where it looked kinda like is that still around? Alright, cool. Yeah I haven't talked to anybody who does clamming yet, but I mean it is--a couple people have said that, that if the lobster fishing goes down... I don't even know what that means, but even if they migrate north, that would be the bigger concern than like the population really going away. And I know in Stonington that seems to be at the forefront, at least of Maine Coast Fishermen in places like that, they're kinda thinking about it. But you guys could see the next--you're kind of in the prime position for the next boom!

[0:43:50.1]

SB: Right, exactly. Well I think we're in the next boom, I mean I can't--I just can't imagine catching more lobsters than what we're doing now. As far as the state, and I'm not talking just up here or myself or anything like that, but the state, 100... What was it, 100 and 10, 11 million pounds last year? And we were down almost 20 million pounds. That's crazy, that's just astronomical numbers.

GK: I know, I wonder what sort of uproar there would be if there was a cap on how many pounds you could catch. You couldn't do it!

SB: Oh Jesus, oh God. You'd have pissed off people.

GK: Yeah, that would be too extreme, it'd be like living in a--people would say it's communism or something.

SB: Yeah, right.

GK: But it is--because the question I was going to ask 'cause like what is a way to level it out, but there really isn't.

SB: No. No, 'cause I mean lobstering is a game of the harder you work, the more you make. The more you catch, the more you make. And asking lobstermen not to go to work is a pretty tough business. If there's lobsters there, they're gonna catch 'em.

GK: Do you worry about some of the debt people are in? Or do you just not even--

[loud clunk is heard]

[0:45:11.8]

SB: Nope, not my--not my clown, not my circus. I don't care, go buy whatever you want.

GK: I know, I know. That's how it seems. But I feel like as someone who's on a lot of committees involved in--you're basically advocating for the industry.

SB: Yeah.

GK: Does that put you in a position where you feel responsible to some degree? Or is it just something that you wanted to do because you wanted to look out for--

SB: Well I did it for a few reasons. Obviously I said my father was the president in the MLA, so it's kind of... I felt like it was my duty to help him be on the board. Also I wanted to be a part of knowin' what's goin' on. And helpin' to take care of the industry that treats me so well. There's a lot of guys that wanna get out, they wanna go haul, they wanna collect their check and they wanna go home. "None of this stuff affects me," well it all affects you. That's what people don't realize is every issue, every decision being made doesn't affect me. It's like they wanna put windmills out in Monhegan. I was talking to guys around here, they're like, "well, it doesn't affect me." Well it will when they wanna put windmills off of Beals island. That's gonna affect you. And it starts in Monhegan, so we need to take care of it now. And it's just basic stuff like that, but yeah, I mean and I'm a talkative person, and I like people.

[0:46:57.1]

GK: It's okay, do you have a question?

SONNY'S CHILD: Uh no, I actually thought Dad was talking to somebody else in there.

GK: Do you wanna interview your dad? [Laughs]

SB: But you know, I just... Wanted to be a part of everything. That's why I get asked to join the marketing collaborative, I kinda got coerced into that by the marine resources commissioner. And the union, I joined them to try to--my original thing was to try to start making peace between everybody. And I figured the only way that I could do that was if I was a member of both. And I've gotten a couple of guys to do it with me, and I think, and I don't know if it's necessarily because of anything I did or we did, tensions seem to be a little bit better than what they were, you know. So we'll take that as a blessing.

GK: And that was really in--you were feeling that in the Jonesport Beals community?

SB: Yeah, yeah. I mean it wasn't necessarily only here. It was the whole group of both groups. It's the MLA statewide, and the union is close to statewide. It's getting there. But there was just bad feelings I guess throughout everybody on both sides.

[0:48:38.9]

GK: Yeah, and I think there is this legacy in the fishing industry of like people knowing what's happening in terms of what's going on with regulations and then being able to be in Augusta or being able to put themselves forward to at least have a say in something. At least with the lobster fishery it seems that way. And I think it is... It's surprising to me when people aren't engaged, and not everybody can be engaged, but I wonder too, are you seeing some of the younger generation kinda taking those roles on?

SB: No. Not... Well, yes, somewhat. Nobody really around here, nobody around here's into it. But some of the guys on the MLA board from the western parts up around Stonington and down to Friendship and stuff are younger than me, so they're starting to get into the stuff, so that's good. And I kinda got into it, I was kinda late. I was... I was over 35 before I got started with the stuff.

[0:49:57.1]

GK: Well and maybe it's something that you come to at that age when you start to reflect a little bit on what it's given you. I mean I can't really expect a 20 year old kid who's going offshore making a ton of money to do anything.

SB: Well, and that's--and the MLA has... What'do they call it, it's called a skipper's program. But basically took younger fishermen and they go to PI, or wherever in Canada they can go stay for a while, go fishing with them, and then go to a meeting or whatever and just try to get 'em into the politics of lobstering. And that's produced some people that've really followed it, followed up on it. And stayed with it, and there's a few of 'em on the board of the MLA. So it's worked out kinda neat.

GK: Oh cool, so I heard a story about some, I think it was actually some Jonesport high school kids went to PI.

SB: Yeah, that's the skipper's program.

GK: And they hung out with a fisherman who was like, had wooden traps and one of the kids was like "don't you want to fish like us?" This guy was like, "No." [laughs] I don't want a bunch of debt. He was like catching his--he was purse seining for his own herring and freezing it in the winter. Totally crazy!

[0:51:28.6]

SB: Oh yeah. Keep your expenses low.

GK: Yeah, it's true. So the Maine Marketing Collaborative? That's what it is?

SB: Maine Lobster Marketing--

GK: Maine Lobster Marketing Collaborative. I saw some stuff that they did at the forum, but what--they're just trying to get it so that Maine is the word in lobster?

SB: Yep, yep basically. Just trying to push the Maine brand, the new show brand. Making--doing different videos, talkin' with all kinds of media and chefs and stuff like that. This year we're doing on a little bit different route. I'm not--I missed the phone call the other night, we had a conference call Thursday night, I couldn't make it. Had kids basketball. So I missed the phone call so I haven't even looked at my email yet to see exactly what the whole thing's entailing, but it's gonna be a little bit different I guess, going to a store. Different... Different part of the supply chain towards I think the distributors and stuff I think, I'm not sure. I don't dare to guess anymore 'cause I'm not positive.

[0:52:47.1]

GK: Well, and AC is doing, AC Inc. does processing is that right?

SB: Yeah, I think he's--I don't know if he's doing lobsters or not, I don't know. I know they shell clams, I know they pick crab meat. But other than that I don't know. He might be, I don't know.

GK: Do you think he's kind of secretive? This can be off the record--

[Tape Cuts]

GK: You know, who knows? Some of this stuff, some of this photos and stories about lobstermen are a great way to get that marketing out. But I think it is important, I mean I was even talking to Sanford Kelly about blueberries the other day, and he was just like "Yeah, we need to--I'm just trying to get the Maine Blueberry Commission to slap "Maine" on everything, but they won't do it because Wyman's has factories in Canada, and so you know, it's like--Oh man, it just gets so political!

SB: Yeah. Well it's 'bout like anything else. Political.

GK: Do you guys have run ins with--are you fishing in the gray zone at all?

[0:53:56.4]

SB: No, no. They can have that, I'm all set. It's bad enough where I fish, but down there... Nope I am quite happy where I fish.

GK: Yeah, and the territory stuff out there is sorta wild west it feels like. I mean, even off shore.

SB: Yeah, it can be. Down there especially, 'cause they just get someone over the top, they just cut you. Cut your line and keep on goin'.

GK: Yeah, that's crazy. Well we've been going for an hour, so is there anything else you wanna say right now that you thought of?

SB: No. No.

GK: That was great.

[0:54:35.4]

END OF SONNY_BEAL_JONESPORT_TFC_AUDIO_01